CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 21 August 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Goonetilleke (Sri Lanka)

GE.97-63863 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 775th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like at the outset to extend, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, a warm welcome to the newly appointed representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Ian Soutar, who is attending the plenary meeting of the Conference for the first time today. Ambassador Soutar brings with him rich experience on matters before this Conference. Suffice it to say that he was for three years Assistant Head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Department of the Foreign Office. I am sure the Conference will extend to him its full cooperation and support.

I should now like to make some opening remarks at the start of the Sri Lankan presidency of the Conference.

As you are aware, the 1997 session of the Conference on Disarmament will come to an end with the presidency of Sri Lanka. This being the situation, the CD has to take stock of the work it has done during the course of its deliberations in 1997 and prepare its report to the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly, which is due to begin approximately a month from now.

Prior to my assumption of responsibilities of the presidency, several colleagues of mine inquired from me what plans I have to conduct the work of the Conference during my tenure. Having sat through the formal and informal meetings of the CD during the current session and noting the progress of our work, or, to be precise, the lack of it, and the remaining time available to the CD, it was not difficult for me to respond to that question. According to rule 44 of the rules of procedure of the Conference, it should begin consideration of its draft report to the General Assembly of the United Nations at least two weeks before the end of the session. This gives the Conference not more than one week to consider the substantive issues before it. We, therefore, simply do not have time to cover fresh ground.

Delegations are perfectly aware how the Conference proceeded during the first two parts of the current session. During this period, some delegations made repeated attempts to begin our work seriously and earnestly. In this process a number of documents were submitted to the CD by those delegations, both individually and collectively. Although the Conference was unable to resolve the problems it encountered in the process, these contributions remain as sentinels to remind us of the attempts made by us to overcome the difficulties we have encountered. They will also serve as the institutional memory of the CD to guide our way in the years to come. Consequently, we should not be discouraged thinking that we have wasted one whole year of the time allotted to the CD.

Looking at the situation the Conference is facing today, we have to be mindful of several aspects. The first and foremost is the fact that the CD is the sole multilateral negotiating body responsible for disarmament matters. Speaking of our negotiating mandate, Sir Michael Weston, the former Ambassador

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of the United Kingdom, in his farewell statement reminded us of the fact that negotiation can begin only when the climate is propitious for such an endeavour. If there is no meeting of minds representing the entirety of the CD membership, there is no prospect for negotiation on any issue, whether they fall into the category of nuclear disarmament, conventional arms or any other specific area of interest. However, we must accept the fact that negotiation cannot begin in a vacuum. Prior to serious negotiations, identification of subjects should take place. That should be followed by a process of consultation ending up with agreement on the parameters of negotiation to be conducted. Past experience has taught us that even after going through this process, negotiation may not take place until such time as there is a consensus to commence negotiation.

Another related factor is that the CD is not an institution that can conduct negotiations continuously year after year, and produce international instruments as if they are coming out of an automated factory. The long duration of time taken by the CD to agree to start negotiations on the CWC and the CTBT is an example of how time-consuming such decisions can be.

However, the CD cannot and must not wait motionless for situations to evolve on their own. The Conference can be pro-active and prepare itself for future negotiations by undertaking consultations and preparing the ground for such work. For example, while negotiations were under way on a CTBT, consultations were carried out by Ambassador Shannon of Canada with a view to reaching agreement on an FMCT. I have referred to this particular instance only as an example of how consultations on issues considered important by the Conference were carried out, while serious negotiations were also being conducted on a CTBT. It is my sincere hope that the CD will proceed in this manner when it begins its 1998 session.

The second aspect is the method of our decision-making. In keeping with the rules of procedure of the CD, all substantive decisions are taken by consensus. There are critics of this process. However, taking into consideration the nature of our work, it has to be admitted that decisions through another process would be difficult. That being the case, delegations have to accept the fact that without a consensus, no important decision can be taken by the CD. In view of this reality, delegations cannot afford to be overambitious or attempt to force decisions on the Conference and expect such moves to succeed. How should we then proceed? In my opinion, the Conference should be ready to conduct negotiations when such a move is feasible. Meanwhile, consultations should continue on other subjects with a view to bringing them to maturity, or, in other words, to a stage where negotiations will be possible.

The third point is the autonomous character of the Conference. This has led some delegations to maintain that the CD is the master of its house. However, on certain occasions, the CD seems to have accepted the fact that it should heed the calls made by the international community. The CTBT was one such example. There is a reason for this position. For every delegation represented in the Conference, roughly speaking, there are two other delegations out there. The CD is neither self-funded, nor is it conducting

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business for its own exclusive use. It is the international community as a whole which is the eventual beneficiary of our deliberations. It is the international community whom we expect to support our endeavours and accept the final products that come out of this body in the form of international instruments. We should, therefore, not consider ourselves as a totally independent entity. Instead, we have to conduct ourselves as master craftsmen entrusted with a specific function by the international community. In the circumstances, while we make attempts to project our national views and protect our national interests, we have also to be mindful of the responsibilities given to us by the international community and our obligations towards it. It is against this background we should ask ourselves whether we have discharged the responsibilities reposed on us diligently. In 1998, are we going to conduct our business in the same manner as was done in 1997? I hope "no" will be the answer.

The Conference has exhausted one whole year attempting to decide on the programme of work for 1997. Even after reaching an agreement on the agenda, we have failed to reach any decision on the specific item or items that can be taken up for negotiation by the Conference. In the circumstances, it is rather disheartening to hear, during the informal consultations on Tuesday 19, delegations repeating their often stated positions without due regard to the existing situation in the CD.

The answer to our problem cannot be found by dividing the agenda into two or three broad areas such as nuclear disarmament, conventional disarmament, etc. and consigning all subjects into two or three separate baskets. As the delegations are well aware, despite its shortcomings, we have adopted an agenda. Our problem was more related to the work programme, or to be precise, our inability to treat separately items that are ripe for negotiation and those other items which require further consultation. The problem lies in our inability to appreciate the preoccupations of each other and the failure to be accommodating to the extent possible, in the common interest of mankind.

Towards the end of the second part of our session in June, there was a ray of hope that the CD would re-establish one or more ad hoc committees and even establish another ad hoc committee. Although we were unable to lock on to that opportunity, I am optimistic that in 1998 the Conference will be able to take a quick decision on the matter and commence negotiations as early as possible. Meanwhile, consultations can be held to narrow the differences on other agenda items. If the Conference can reach such an understanding during this session, we can jointly take pride that the era of polemics and rhetoric is behind us and the CD will face the year 1998 with justifiable confidence. With that optimistic note, I would like to conclude my opening remarks.

I should now like to invite the Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, to make a statement.

Mr. PETROVSKY (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations): I have asked for the floor in order to bring to the attention of the Conference the statement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, regarding the decision of the United States to participate in the Ottawa Process negotiations on a treaty banning anti-personnel landmines and his expectations from our Conference in this regard. The statement reads as follows:

"The Secretary-General welcomes the announcement that the United States will participate in the Ottawa Process negotiations on a treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. He is convinced that such a treaty is urgently needed to put an end to the enormous suffering caused every day by this indiscriminate weapon. The action by the United States comes at a critical moment, as arrangements are being made to open formal negotiations in Oslo on 1 September. The Secretary-General hopes that the Oslo conference will succeed in concluding a truly comprehensive ban, which will come to the General Assembly for endorsement at its coming session. He looks forward to opening the treaty for signature in Ottawa this December.

"The Secretary-General of the United Nations also hopes that there will be progress in the parallel efforts being made in the Conference on Disarmament to achieve universality of a total ban on these horrific weapons."

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Petrovsky, for his statement. I have on my list of speakers for today the representative of the United States of America. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. CRITTENBERGER (United States of America): Mr. President, at the outset of my statement, let me first congratulate you on assuming the presidency and wish you every success in the performance of your important duties. You may count on the United States delegation's fullest cooperation. As you yourself have noted in your introductory remarks, among these duties we hope will include setting the stage for a more fruitful year in 1998, and your remarks certainly indicate that you will spare no efforts to try to set the proper stage. You may count, in that context, on the United States delegation's fullest cooperation.

I take the floor this morning briefly to note formally the United States policy decision concerning anti-personnel landmines, which the White House announced earlier this week.

President Clinton has made clear his firm commitment to conclude as soon as possible a comprehensive worldwide agreement banning the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel landmines (APLs). To that end, the United States has been working in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to initiate negotiations on a ban that could secure the widest possible adherence. In that context, we welcomed the appointment of a Special

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Coordinator on APLs and hope that his efforts will pave the way for early agreement to establish an ad hoc committee on anti-personnel landmines in the Conference on Disarmament.

At the same time, the United States notes that support for the Ottawa Process has grown significantly. We want to take advantage of the momentum behind the Ottawa Process and help build on the support it already has. Thus, as you know, the White House announced on 18 August that the United States will actively participate in the Ottawa Process negotiations which begin on 1 September in Oslo. The objective of those negotiations is to conclude a treaty text for signing in December. We will work to secure an agreement that achieves our humanitarian goals while protecting our national security interests.

Let me stress that we remain committed to the establishment of step-by-step negotiations towards a global ban in the CD. That effort remains essential since the CD's membership includes most of the major historical producers and exporters of APLs, a number of whom have said they will not participate in the Oslo negotiations nor sign any treaty that results from those negotiations.

The United States will also continue our efforts to ratify the CCW Amended Mines Protocol and urge others to do the same. That Protocol, if adhered to, could make a significant contribution to resolving the landmines problem, especially when added to other international efforts to curb these "weapons of mass destruction in slow motion".

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United States of America for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I give the floor to the Ambassador of Nigeria.

Mr. ABUAH (Nigeria): Mr. President, let me warmly welcome you to the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, particularly at this stage in the 1997 calendar of the CD. We would like to assure you that this delegation will extend all the cooperation you deserve to assure the success of your work. Let me, more or less in the same breath, commend Ambassador Krasnohorská, the distinguished Ambassador of Slovakia, your predecessor, for her invaluable contribution to the CD process.

It will be recalled that not too long ago the Group of 21 submitted a proposal contained in document CD/1462 which contained certain elements which have been crying out for re-establishment of mechanisms, in this case the ad hoc committees, to take them a stage forward. In this regard, the Group noted that certain delegations had asked for time to consult with their respective capitals as to how to proceed with the requests, the proposals, of the Group of 21. In the intervention of this delegation on behalf of the Group of 21 on the 7th of this month, the question was put through you to those delegations whether they were in a position at that point in time to let the Conference benefit from the results of the consultations with the respective capitals. I have the honour again to ask the Conference through

(Mr. Abuah, Nigeria)

you whether these delegations are now ready today, in this Conference, at this plenary, to let us benefit from the instructions they have received. The idea is that work on these committees can go forward.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Nigeria for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. SOUTAR (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): I have asked for the floor not at this stage to respond to the statement of the distinguished representative of Nigeria, but merely to, if I may, first congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency, Sir, and, secondly, to thank you and through you the members of the Conference for your very kind words of welcome, and, thirdly, to say that I look forward with pleasure to working with the members of the Conference on the important tasks which face us and which you, if I may say so, set out so succinctly in your opening remarks.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. ILLANES (Chile) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all allow me to convey to you the cordial congratulations of my delegation and express the conviction that under your expert and efficient chairmanship this Conference will make important progress. The statement you made impressed me a great deal and I believe that it is built on the basis of wisdom and my delegation would like the text to be distributed in extenso as soon as possible to delegations. At the same time, my delegation expresses its gratitude to the Ambassador of Slovakia, who discharged her duties in a vigorous and devoted manner at the helm of the Conference. We are indebted to her. My delegation also wishes to extend a very cordial welcome to the new representative of the United Kingdom, and of course to tell him that we are very willing to work with him in order to attain the objectives of this Conference.

I wish to announce that my Government has decided to participate fully in the Ottawa Process and consequently has subscribed to the Brussels resolution and will be participating in the Oslo conference as a full member. This does not in any way imply that we have changed our view that there is a great task which the Conference on Disarmament must pursue in the future on the issue of anti-personnel mines, a task that we think should be complementary to and consistent with the Ottawa Process and in no way in conflict with it. The objective of universality is a very important objective that we cannot set aside, so that we think, together with many other like-minded delegations, that from next year onwards there could be a very interesting job to be done in this Conference on this very important disarmament issue which of course has a humanitarian aspect of the greatest significance, which causes concern to world public opinion and to Governments, but which also contains other aspects that need to be studied,

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addressed here in a serious and careful manner so as to ensure the widest possible participation in an agreement which will be universal in scope.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Chile for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. BENITEZ (Argentina) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on taking the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of my delegation's firm support. Allow me also to congratulate the Ambassador of Slovakia for the way she guided our proceedings during her term of office. I would also like to welcome the new representative of the United Kingdom. The main purpose of my taking the floor was simply to inform you that our country too has subscribed to the Brussels declaration and is preparing to participate in the Oslo meeting. This certainly does not signify a change in our position concerning the need we perceive for the Conference on Disarmament to engage subsequently in work which will complement the results obtained in Ottawa, and we note with great satisfaction that Latin America is united in this endeavour.

The PRESIDENT I thank the representative of Argentina for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage, particularly in relation to the question posed by the Ambassador of Nigeria in his capacity as the Coordinator of the Group of 21? I give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Ms. CRITTENBERGER (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor a second time this morning, but I think, in all fairness, we do owe an answer to the question that has been put by the distinguished representative of Nigeria. At the end of the last part of our session, a number of questions were put in a long, two-day plenary regarding the work of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation was among those that pressed at the time for establishment of ad hoc committees on anti-personnel landmines, transparency in armaments and fissile material cut-off. No consensus on those issues was reached. We hope that we can return to these questions soon with a more positive result. Also at the end of the last session, my delegation said that it was not in a position to definitively respond to the question of whether we could agree to the establishment of ad hoc committees on negative security assurances and outer space. I would like to respond to those questions now from the point of view of substance, and in the overall context of the Conference's work and the calendar.

On substance, let me recall that my delegation expressed the view that there was not, nor had there been, an arms race in outer space. Consequently, the agenda item "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" is not in our view accurate, nor is the old mandate for the Ad Hoc Committee that used to exist. You will recall that we made those points in the plenary discussion at the end of the last part of the session, and I had indicated at that time that my delegation had instructions to seek a change in the outer space mandate. Thus, while my delegation has no objection in principle to the

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re-establishment of an ad hoc committee on outer space, it did not agree to do so at this time, prior to addressing the issue of its mandate. I would also like to note that during that plenary discussion other delegations also indicated some concerns with regard to the work of the outer space ad hoc committee and indicated their willingness to consult on this issue. To date, we have held no such consultations, but my delegation is prepared to participate. I would like to further clarify the United States position so that there is no misunderstanding. The United States believes that the existing outer space legal regime has served us well, and there is no evidence there is need for new procedures. We believe that were the Conference to engage on this issue, it should first identify a specific substantive subject in this area that could be discussed. We are not sure what the topic would be.

Turning to the question of negative security assurances, my delegation continues to question what such an ad hoc committee might usefully do, particularly in light of the recent steps already taken by my own Government and others in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 984, on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference and a series of protocols to nuclear-weapon-free zones, the result of which has extended legally binding security guarantees to many parts of the globe.

Turning to the question of the overall context of the CD's work and our calendar, my delegation cannot but ask the question - What is the purpose of establishing these ad hoc committees at this point in time as we prepare to draft our final report to the United Nations General Assembly? For the United States, regardless of the import of the issues, they do not constitute the priority work we see for the Conference on Disarmament. The fissile material cut-off treaty and anti-personnel landmines do. We question what the objective would be in establishing these ad hoc committees at this point in time and whether the point would only be to report to the United Nations that we actually did something. We think that we should be honest and we should have greater respect for ourselves than that. We are not a "make work" body. We do important work when there is agreement to do it. If the object in establishing ad hoc committees now would be to break the logjam, this is indeed a desire we share, but we think the efforts would be better spent at this point in time in laying the groundwork for rapid decisions at the outset of the 1998 session so that we do not face the same problems next year as we do this year. We are prepared, Mr. President, to participate with you in your efforts to try to lay such a groundwork and are encouraged by your willingness to do so in your remarks this morning.

So, in summary, it is not clear to my delegation what the point would be in establishing these two ad hoc committees at this time. We are prepared to work with others to lay the ground for productive work next year. Of course, in our view, the focus should be on APL and FMCT. Transparency in armaments is also of importance to the United States, and we would also look positively at that time on re-establishing the negative security assurances and outer space ad hoc committees, to which we hold no fundamental objections in principle. We would, of course, as I have noted, wish to revisit the question of the outer space ad hoc committee mandate.

Mrs. BOURGOIS (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on behalf of my country and on my own behalf on taking over the presidency, and to extend my warm thanks to you for having agreed to perform this task in somewhat exceptional and difficult circumstances. We know that with you this Conference will work well. Consequently, following your example, I must respond immediately to the question raised by one of the speakers this morning which, in a way, is addressed to the French delegation, insofar as we were one of those delegations which requested more time on the subject of security assurances in June for purely procedural reasons. We needed to check on the terms of our instructions. Of course, the French authorities are in favour of increasing the number of security assurances. I will not recall here the scale of the guarantees already afforded by my country, whether they be positive or negative, in the latter case through the relevant protocols to treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones which have all been ratified by France, which therefore cover more than 100 countries, but as far as the Conference on Disarmament is concerned, the question was more simply whether an ad hoc committee on security assurances with a mandate drawn up in 1992 was still the order of the day. I can immediately say that we have no objection in principle to the re-establishment of such a committee, nor indeed to the 1992 wording as far as this mandate is concerned.

Having said that, what exactly do we want to do? At this late date, are we trying to paper over the lack of an agreement in the Conference to get down to serious negotiations on a subject that is ripe for them - and there are at least two such subjects - or are we really trying to address a problem? We have the feeling that this is rather more of a bureaucratic procedure intended to puff up artificially our empty balance sheet for this year. This is why we hesitate to use this ploy, because we know that between now and 10 September no serious work can be done. Consequently - and I come back to your introductory statement, Mr. President - we believe that today the Conference needs to consider first and foremost the ways and means of approaching next year in a serious and specific way. There are many ways of doing this. They could involve continued consultations on various subjects, or inter-sessional work on these subjects. They could also involve the attention given to the drafting of its annual report to the United Nations General Assembly, and here I would like to indicate that, within the framework of this report, my delegation would have no objection to the subject of negative security assurances being broached in a positive way.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of France for her statement and her kind words to me. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. SOUTAR (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): My predecessor, in one of his last actions as the United Kingdom representative, sought instructions on the point raised by a previous speaker in order that I should have something to contribute to this morning's discussion. I find myself, like the two previous speakers, wondering whether at this stage in the Conference's calendar it is wise to devote resources and energy to the establishment of ad hoc committees on these subjects. Our

(Mr. Soutar, United Kingdom)

feeling is that, to take up a point which you made in your opening statement, Mr. President, we should concentrate our efforts at this stage in the session on creating the conditions for a smooth and rapid start to substantive work in this Conference in 1998, and I hope that this work might include enabling the Special Coordinators to pursue their consultations and to present preliminary reports, and I note in this context that the distinguished representative of Australia has already presented a first progress report. Next year, when we come to consider the establishment of ad hoc committees, we shall want to see a balance struck between the Conference's work on nuclear issues on the one hand and conventional issues on the other. For our part, I can confirm that the United Kingdom would like to see the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament reflect our key priorities on the disarmament agenda, and for the record I confirm that on the nuclear side, our top priority is the urgent negotiation and conclusion of a fissile material cut-off treaty, and on the conventional side, our top priority is to work towards the global ban on APLs to complement the Ottawa treaty, which we hope will be opened for signature this December.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I give the floor to the Ambassador of India.

Ms. GHOSE (India): I had not meant to take the floor today, but I am happy to do so under your presidency, Sir, and take this opportunity to congratulate you on taking this responsibility at a time when we are still, as we have been throughout this year, in a rather fragile situation. But do accept my delegation's assurances of cooperation with you during your presidency. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor for her untiring efforts in trying to get a programme of work established by this Conference. At the same time, may I also welcome our new members, particularly the new Ambassador of the United Kingdom, to what has been called perhaps one of the most exclusive clubs in Geneva? We look forward to working with him.

The reason I am taking the floor is to set on record what our priority is. This has been stated and restated, not just by my delegation but by the delegations of the G.21, individually or through their Coordinators, throughout the year. Our priority has been, from the beginning, the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, and we have repeatedly tried to elaborate the idea, present drafts, put forward various possible mandates for negotiation, but we have got nowhere on these. During the course of the year, therefore, and it will be recalled, Mr. President - nobody would recall this better than you, since it was Sri Lanka which had proposed that we try and get something moving, and I was very happy to hear the representative of the United States recognize that - what the G.21 has been trying to do is not to impose their priority on the CD, but to try and find a way ahead for the CD to do some work. Clearly, it cannot be our intention with two or three weeks left for the CD for us to start working on any ad hoc committee immediately, but we do see a possibility to lay foundations for a programme of work next year, and that is what I think you said in your introductory remarks. It was in that spirit that the G.21

(Ms. Ghose, India)

had tried to see where we have differing priorities. We have heard the priorities of some countries. The priority of the G.21 is clear, and clearly we are not coinciding at the present moment. So, the G.21, in a positive spirit, tried to find a way in which - not just to take up our time - the two ad hoc committees could be re-established. The two committees suggested by us are extremely important in themselves, and my delegation is very pleased to note that there has been no objection to these ad hoc committees. This does not mean that we establish them immediately, but at least we can perhaps take a decision this year to establish them next year in the programme of work. This would be a decision which would have to be confirmed by the 1998 session of the CD when it meets again in January. So I would like to repeat this point, that we are aware of the priorities of different countries. These priorities have not coincided during 1997. We have not been able to make much progress on either side. In a spirit of trying to keep the important work of the CD ongoing - and as you said, we are not sort of plucking apples off of trees, or whatever - I forgot the exact metaphor you used; we are not producing treaties out of boxes - but these are both items on the agenda. The agenda for 1997 was agreed, and we therefore felt that these would be areas where work could fruitfully start next year. In this context, I would also like to add that my delegation is not averse to revisiting the mandate, for example, of the Committee on Outer Space. The delegate of the United States has suggested that this is necessary, and we are quite prepared to cooperate to see how we can come to an agreed mandate and perhaps, Mr. President, we could leave this to you to check with delegations in the remaining two or three weeks, or even inter-sessionally since you remain President until 31 December, to see how we can come to an agreed mandate so that this item could at least be included in our programme of work in 1998.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of India for her statement and the kind words she addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. ALBON (South Africa): Allow me to add my delegation's congratulations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the office of President of the Conference on Disarmament. As the Conference will recall from the last time that my delegation addressed the issue of the establishment of ad hoc committees at an informal session of the Conference, and following further consultations with my capital in this regard, South Africa's position on the establishment of an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances remains unchanged. As was previously stated in greater detail, South Africa is firmly of the view that the appropriate venue for addressing the issue of security assurances is within the strengthened review process of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Accordingly, I wish to inform you that South Africa continues to oppose the establishment of an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances in the Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of South Africa for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. SHA (China) (translated from Chinese): Mr. President, first of all my delegation would like to express our sincere congratulations to you on taking the Chair. We know that you are an extremely experienced diplomat in the field of disarmament. Although we have come to the final stage of our third session this year, we still hope that under your presidency we will still be able to make some headway in the remaining part of our third session. At the same time I would also like to avail myself of this opportunity to express to your predecessor, the Ambassador of Slovakia, our thanks for her industrious efforts. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues, the Ambassador of Chile and the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. I would be most pleased to cooperate fully with them.

In the following I would like to briefly comment on the two points made by the Coordinator of the G.21. The Chinese delegation has always held the view that the CD should establish an ad hoc committee on NSA as soon as possible and negotiate on the provision of unconditional security guarantees to the non-nuclear-weapon States. My delegation believes that the international situation has undergone colossal changes. The cold war has ended. Confrontation has ended. The situation has relaxed. The relationship between the major Powers has also improved. If in the past there might have been some excuse for not providing security assurances, today these reasons no longer exist. Therefore the Chinese delegation holds the view that, in the first place, the demands put forward by the non-aligned countries are justified and reasonable. Second, I believe that the time is also opportune. In this regard, my delegation has the deep impression that the G.21 has long ago put forward this proposal. Today we are belatedly listening to the response made by the relevant parties. The Chinese delegation appreciates the action of making the response. This is because a late response is better than no response at all. Otherwise, someone will say again that we ran out of time. My delegation still hopes that, under your presidency and of course at your convenience, you can enter into further consultations with the parties concerned. If this is not possible this year, then at the very beginning of the CD session next year we may be able to enter into discussions immediately on this issue. If indeed technically it is not feasible to do so this year, can we reach a common understanding and come to a decision that this issue would be discussed at the outset of the CD session next year?

I would also like to make a comment on landmines. Now many countries are proceeding to Ottawa to take part in the Ottawa Process on landmines. The Chinese delegation respects the choices made by these countries and wishes them good luck. However, as far as the Chinses delegation is concerned, we believe that, whatever perspective one may have, the landmine does not deserve to become a focus of negotiation at the CD. Why? Because the landmine is too small in terms of scale. It is not qualified. In fact, the Chinese delegation holds the view that outer space is much bigger and far more important. It is said that there is no arms race in outer space at present. This is fine - we hope this is indeed the reality. Is there militarization of outer space? We hope there is not any. If there is indeed no arms race in outer space, then what is wrong with the proposal put forward by the G.21 to prevent an arms race in outer space? Therefore, we support the request of the G.21 to establish an ad hoc committee on outer space to negotiate on the issue

(Mr. Sha, China)

of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We do not wish to see a repetition of a historical mistake. It will be too late to deal with this problem when the race has entered into an intense phase.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of China for his statement. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? It does not seem to be the case. I would be stating the obvious if I were to say that I was quite heartened by the responses given by several delegations this morning to the question posed by the representative of the G.21. If I got the sentiment of those delegations right, I believe they do not have an objection in principle to the re-establishment of the two ad hoc committees, namely, on NSA and on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, subject to certain conditions. I am certain that the Conference will agree with me that further consultations on this matter will be required to reach a final agreement. I believe that during the remaining days available to the Conference, we will be able to reach such an agreement with the kind of goodwill that seems to have entered this room, and if there are no other delegations wishing to take the floor at this point in time, I would like to move to the next item.

As I informed the group coordinators yesterday at the Presidential consultations, in accordance with rule 44 of the rules of procedure of the Conference, I have prepared, with the assistance of the secretariat, the draft of our annual report to the General Assembly of the United Nations. The draft report will be available in all official languages in delegations' pigeon-holes on Mcnday, 25 August 1997. My intention is to start consideration of the draft annual report at an informal plenary meeting to be held after the plenary meeting of Thursday, 28 August 1997.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held next Thursday, 28 August 1997, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.